

BREEZY, GROCER'S CLERK.

By J. George Frederick

WHEN the prosperous though unprogressive firm of Casper W. Leslie & Co., grocers, hired him they thought they had secured an ordinary clerk, and gave themselves no further concern. They already had a force of about a dozen clerks, beside half a dozen delivery teams. They had hired clerks for twenty years, and it was to them a troublesome and vexatious proceeding. They frowned at first at his slight frame, but when he put a prostrate sugar barrel on end with easy unconcern, all objections were immediately withdrawn.

His surname was the leveling one of Smith, and his Christian name—highly Christian—Hezekiah. His mother called him "Zeke" and his companions "Breezy."

Breezy entered upon his work whistling in supreme content. He was at the bottom of the commercial hill, and was preparing to run up the top. He had no star-high ambitions to make him dream, no love affairs to make him forgetful, and no voices to keep him from doing his best. There wasn't a lazy tendon in his body. He was a black-eyed, nervous and muscular. Before his ponderous companions got an idea through their heads Breezy had made his work with the action. A few thought he was a genius; but they were mistaken. Breezy was innocent of the smallest spark. He just had a heavy capital of nervous energy that made him work while others were content to lounge.

They put him behind the fruit counter. His first act was to clean it up and "fix things." Such a rum way of doing business, he muttered, quite like an experienced grocer, scowling at the hidden waste and slipshod displays of his predecessor. When he was through with the counter, there was absolutely no fault to find with it. But he was not satisfied. He went into the cellar and started to saw and nail some boxes to make his work easier for various things back of his counter.

"What are you doing here?" said the pompous and obese superintendent, finding him at work.

"Oh," said Breezy carelessly, "I'm just getting some boxes in shape to put dirt and tools in at my counter."

"We have got a carpenter to do that," said the superintendent, with displeasure; "get up where you belong and tend to your customers."

Breezy went up, and finished the boxes later when the superintendent was absent. He cleaned the fruit on his stand four times a day. "It gets so blamed mused up," he said bristly to a fellow clerk who looked askance at the other clerk didn't," replied his companion suggestively.

"Didn't he?" said Breezy coolly. Of course the clerks laughed at him. He was away and of objectionable hue, and his trousers lacked the proper cut and crease.

The fruit trade was slow, and Breezy was highly impatient. The superintendent compelled him to stay behind his counter, and he had to gaze impatiently over the bustling crowd of the store, which seemed to stop at every other counter but his. Twice, when the superintendent was not about, he made a personal canvass among the shoppers and secured a number of sales. The third time he was discovered and peremptorily ordered back.

After closing time Breezy was almost-mindless and restless. The noise of the overhead cash system; the aroma of freshly roasted coffee; of bacon and cheese; the click of the weighing scales; the squeaking of the busy scooper; the shrill staccato of the register bells and opening drawers; the rustle of the wrapping paper; the shuffle of hurrying feet; the number of the drays on the cobbles outside; the incessant hum of voices, and the ever-changing panorama of shoppers—all these had become to Breezy the breath of life, and he sighed for them longingly over the evenings were over. He had a printing press, and he set type as a means of diversion—all matter concerning the grocery store.

He set up a card and embodied in it the idea that he had conceived. He printed 200 of them—each card had a picture of him. They were invitations to the public to have any and all sorts of fruit delivered at their homes at any time by telephone orders. He laid one on Mr. Leslie's desk the next morning.

"Thompson," Breezy heard Leslie call shortly afterwards to the superintendent, "this is a good idea. How many did you have printed?"

Thompson grew red. "I didn't have any printed," he replied in surprise. Leslie frowned and called his partner, who also frowned and ignored Breezy. Breezy watched them from behind the register, and then ventured forward.

"I printed them on my own press. Here are 500 more."

Leslie looked again at the card, and then raised his eyebrows at Thompson, who nodded in return, seemingly signifying that this was the clerk mentioned in some previous conversation.

"You may hand in your bill for them to the bookkeeper," said Leslie evenly; "and Thompson, you may have them properly distributed."

He was paid for the cards, and there was also an extra dollar in his weekly pay envelope, that Saturday afternoon he promptly bought the best seat in the theatre.

They found him the next week in the telephone booth, calling up excessively from a list of over 100 residences. "Is this Mrs. Jones?" he would ask. "Pardon me, Mrs. Jones; this is Leslie's."

"We would like to sell you some groceries," and then he would enter into a conversation for an order. The other people on the line were indignant, and the exchange told him that he was not the only one on the line. But in less than an hour Breezy had hurried orders aggregating \$20, and Leslie himself closed Thompson's mouth with a word of commendation.

The firm's telephone trade had never been worked up, and Breezy printed announcements inviting customers to use the phone to send their orders. A name was written behind the fruit counter and Breezy took the orders. He did more. "You're going to bake, aren't you?" he asked of the housewives when they ordered flour, lard, etc. "Don't forget your baking powder, too. Don't you need some new pans? We've got a splendid new pan here. Patented. Only 8 cents, too." And so on.

"Here, Mr. Thompson," he called to the superintendent as he passed, one day; "who makes these sign cards?"

"Tommy, the shipping clerk," replied Thompson shortly.

"I'm just going to," said Breezy reflectively. "That I might make a nice one for this counter. May I try one?"

"Yes; but don't neglect your counter," Breezy had just received a large quantity of splendid figs that morning, which were selling at a really attractive price. But the firm had not even given him price cards to put on them, and had not mentioned them in the newspaper ads. "How in blazes do they expect to sell these?" he grumbled. "Nobody knows anything about them."

When, therefore, he had surprised the shipping clerk by asking for the card, he had not intended to be able to buy them very many days. The clerks leered at him when he put it over his figs, rearranging the boxes artistically on the counter. Thompson didn't happen around any more that day.

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They Put Him Behind the Fruit Counter. His First Act was to Clean It Up and "Fix Things Generally."

"H'm, h'm," said the superintendent, walking rapidly off.

The other twenty-five went the next day. "Could have said more," said Breezy.

"H'm," said Thompson slowly; and after a minute: "These signs are neatly lettered."

Breezy was vigorously cleaning up. "You may take off the dull hours," continued Thompson cautiously; "and make the signs for the whole store. We'll get an assistant at your counter. Breezy was kicking some boxes under his counter."

"Dye hear," said Thompson. "Yes, sir," said Breezy.

For the next six weeks the customers at Leslie's enjoyed daily treats from the signs. There were no less than fifty made on busy days. The language was simple, it told the truth about the goods, and it never disappointed, and quite often there was a bit of humor in it. The obese superintendent frowned at Breezy's efforts and looked as if he half-regretted his venture.

"The old guy," mused Breezy one day as he saw Thompson deliberately tear one of them up. It was an egg sign, and read: "If you wait until tomorrow to buy these eggs at 15 cents the dozen they may not be as good as they are today." Breezy had just received a new one which read: "It's throwing these eggs at you to sell them for 15 cents the dozen. They're not bad, though."

"Twenty-five," repeated Breezy.

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Thompson stood before it for full two minutes before he decided to let it pass, and then walked away, murmuring, "H'm, h'm."

But Breezy ran to extremes, and one day, when Leslie paused before a cheese sign and read, "Hold your nose here. It only takes the clerk two minutes by the clock to wrap up half a pound at 20 cents," he decided that he would draw the limit, and he told Breezy to take it down, which Breezy did with a rather crestfallen air. He had been particularly proud of this effort, and had stood behind his register a dozen different times during the day to watch customers stare and break out into laughter. A week later they made him take another one down, and Mr. Leslie called him aside.

"Don't try to be so funny on your signs," he frowned. "You make nice signs when you stick to fact, but when you get humorous you are as loud as a barrel of mackerel."

Breezy granted ungracious acquiescence, while the corners of the proper's mouth twitched at the recollection of some of the cards. But they continued to be as flagrant as ever. Thompson complained to Leslie about this and the proprietor sat for a few moments in deep thought.

"That boy's got too much vitality," he said, "and we'll have to give him another outlet for it. Making cards and answering the telephone isn't enough for him to do. I believe that I will put Morris at the telephone and

let Smith do our important outside business down town." The change was accordingly made, and Breezy became a sort of confidential clerk, doing most of the firm's business with the banks and the downtown offices. Characteristically, he allowed no opportunity to escape to learn the firm's manner of doing business and its needs. He was not chary with suggestions, either, and was told by the firm more than once that his advice had not been acted upon, and that it was therefore not very valuable. This logic Breezy utterly failed to comprehend.

His old friends smiled as he dashed by them daily on his bicycle, his hat crushed under his head and his face almost on the handle bars.

The firm sent him to the newspaper office to take advertising copy. The advertisements which he carried leaped freely on the road down town. Most of his criticisms were of a decidedly adverse nature, and his opinion of the man who wrote them, the head of the firm, grew more and more contemptuous. He had learned some lessons in advertising by his card making.

One morning they sent him to a downtown firm of producers with an order for twenty tubs of butter. With the order they gave him a copy to take to all the morning papers, making commonplace and altogether unattractive mention—thought Breezy—of a proposed special sale of these twenty tubs of butter.

"That's the weakest thing yet," he soliloquized, as he sped down the empty avenue. "Butter! on 3 cents a pound one of these days."

As he stood in the office of the company he heard a man say something confidentially to a producer, and saw a customer that made him wink hard. It was that butter would go up in a few days. The customer did not seem to be very serious, but Breezy construed it into a mighty tip.

"Just what I thought," he said to himself. "That slow firm buying only twenty tubs! It occurred to him that he might telephone to the firm and give them the tip; but he immediately rejected the idea.

"They'd only laugh and tell me that I wasn't running their business," he said. Then was born a great idea. An instant later he was decided. The producer whistled when Breezy handed him an order for a hundred tubs of butter. "It'll take all we have," he said.

Breezy sat down at the desk and wrote something rapidly. The evening at the newspaper composing rooms looked at him in surprise as he gave directions about border and type, technicalities which he had learned as editor of the school paper.

The tubs were all delivered in the afternoon. Thompson came out in the warehouse and looked at the first batch of twenty. "I wouldn't have ordered twenty," he said, shaking his head. "I told him they wouldn't go." He wasn't in when the rest came. "Are they turning the store into a butter house?" he said the shipping clerk, scrambling, as he helped the men bring them in.

"Great heaven!" ejaculated Thompson the next morning when he came into the warehouse. "Where does all this butter come from? Are they turning the store into a butter house?" he said the shipping clerk, scrambling, as he helped the men bring them in.

The shipping clerk looked intelligent, and made no answer. Thompson brought in the head of the firm, Mr. Leslie. He, in turn, stared dumbly at the tide of tubs.

"What the —" he began excitedly. "I told you to order twenty, didn't I?" "You advised me not to buy more," said Thompson stiffly, "and I didn't."

"Can't you control?" exclaimed Leslie wrathfully, pointing to the tubs. "There's a hundred there, if there's one!"

When Breezy was finally called in he faced both men easily. "How many tubs of butter did you order?" asked Leslie.

"One hundred,"

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"I told you twenty!" roared Thompson. Leslie did not answer, but made for the telephone. The producer people finally refused to take back the tubs. "We've just refilled our refrigerators and can't accommodate any more," they said. But they added something more in a telephone wrangle.

"Mr. Leslie," Breezy, when the proprietor rang off, without any visible allayment of his wrath, "I was ordered to get only twenty, but I made it a hundred, and here they are."

"You did, did you?" burst out Leslie, glaring at Breezy with unutterable derision. "You'll be advertising yourself as proprietor of this store shortly, won't you?"

"But Mr. Leslie," protested Breezy, "butter's going up in a few days!"

"Great guns!" roared Leslie, "are you running this firm, you—you impudent young fool? You young barrel of gall! I've a notion to break your head!"

Breezy flushed angrily. "Go out and draw your salary, and never set foot back again!"

Breezy turned on his heel and walked out, without looking at the clerks who had assembled at the warehouse door, attracted by the loud voices.

"Fools! fools!" he drove his bicycle along the street.

When he looked at copies of all the morning papers, which appeared the day before in lieu of the originals, he smiled in genuine artistic gratification.

"If that don't sell butter," he chuckled, "nothing ever will." The advertisement predicted that butter would go up very soon, and that Leslie & Co. had bought in anticipation of this, 100 tubs, which they would sell at one cent below the market price.

"There will be a still awfuller row in that shanty when they see these. They might arrest me." But the spirit of Breezy rose hopefully to the possibility. If they only wait till tonight.

He learned afterward that the store was crowded with butter buyers from early morning till late in the afternoon, and that his advertisements had precipitated the coming rise in price, and an advance of one cent was already asked that same day.

It was during the afternoon of the next day that Breezy received a note asking him to call at the office of the grocery firm of Leslie & Co.

"See here, young man," said Leslie to him in his private office, "what you did on Tuesday was a thing that could have put you behind prison bars. Do you understand?"

As Breezy still held his peace, Leslie resumed: "As a result we are—have cleared, well, some hundred dollars."

Breezy still remained silent, and Leslie put on a pompous frown.

"Understand, young man," he declared, "in giving you the position of superintendent and advertising manager of this store, we most certainly wish to express our vehement displeasure at your act of Tuesday, lucky as it happened to turn out, and solemnly warn you that a repetition of such a monstrous offense will mean instant discharge. To hold this position you will have to confine yourself to reasonable and cautious methods of doing business. Your salary will be three hundred dollars a month. Get up now, and don't bother me, but show up ready for work Monday morning."

The only evidence Breezy gave of his satisfaction with this interview was that he rode madly up the full length of the steeply rising city on his way home, to rid himself of surplus nervous energy.

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The Genial Idiot. 3 He Takes a Fall Out of Shakespeare

BY JOHN KENDRICK BANGS

THE Bibliomaniac had just recited the famous soliloquy of the Melancholy Jacques in Shakespeare's "As You Like It":

"All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts. His acts being seven ages. At first the infant, Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms. And then the whining school boy, with his satchel, And skipping morning face, creeping like snail, Unwillingly to school. And then the lover, Sighing like a furnace, with a woeful ballad Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier, Full of strange oaths and bearded like a pard, Jealous in honor, sudden and quick in quarrel, Seeking the bubble reputation, Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice, In fair round belly with good capon lined, With eyes severe and beard of formal cut, Full of wise saws and modern instances; And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon, With spectacles on nose and pouch on side. His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide or his shrunken shank; and his big, manly voice, Turning again toward childish treble, Pipes and whistles in his sound. Last scene of all, That ends this strange, eventful history, Is second childishness and mere oblivion, Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything."

"Magnificent, eh?" he cried, enthusiastically. "I prefer oatmeal for breakfast," replied the Idiot.

"An immortal poem," said the Bibliomaniac.

"Perhaps, but I still wish in spite of the fact that we have Clyde Bibe and George Adams on our plays for us, that Mr. Shakespeare could come back to town," said the Idiot, absent-mindedly pouring the maple syrup into his coffee. "There are a lot of statements that man has made that I think, in the light of modern developments, he'd like to modify. Just take those lines you have just recited, for instance, in which the immortal William says:

"And then the whining school boy, with his satchel, And skipping morning face, creeping like snail, Unwillingly to school. And then the lover, Sighing like a furnace, with a woeful ballad Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier, Full of strange oaths and bearded like a pard, Jealous in honor, sudden and quick in quarrel, Seeking the bubble reputation, Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice, In fair round belly with good capon lined, With eyes severe and beard of formal cut, Full of wise saws and modern instances; And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon, With spectacles on nose and pouch on side. His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide or his shrunken shank; and his big, manly voice, Turning again toward childish treble, Pipes and whistles in his sound. Last scene of all, That ends this strange, eventful history, Is second childishness and mere oblivion, Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything."

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